

BLACKWATER SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Community Outreach Efforts

**THE MAGNOLIA
CENTER**



See page 5

ANNUAL REPORT 2012

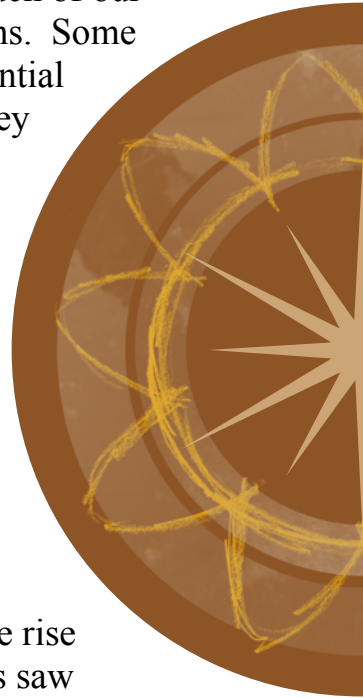
2012 OVERVIEW

Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has now completed its 70th year of service in Santa Rosa County. In that time, Blackwater SWCD has labored extensively to meet the natural resource challenges of the county through voluntary non-regulatory methods. The District is run by five locally elected board members, who in turn have a close and personal connection to the people and place they call home. This caring commitment by which they serve has made possible the forging of strong bonds between the District and local landowners. As a result, over the years, the District along with its employees has dispensed countless hours of conservation technical assistance to those in need. Blackwater SWCD has toiled

hand-in-hand
with many
in the
county
putting

sound conservation measures on the ground.

This year Mother Nature was in a more generous mood and blessed much of our area with plentiful summer rains. Some of these storms generated torrential downpours, so much so that they set rainfall event records. Regardless of the periodic heavy shower, the offering of wet weather was welcomed with open arms for it alleviated much of the drought conditions from last year. This precipitation, which fell during the growing season, greatly nourished the developing cotton and peanut plants in the field and thus gave rise to a bountiful harvest. Farmers saw bumper yields, with some fields producing almost double the normal expected crop. On average, yields were about a third higher than



2012 OVERVIEW



typical and set records on many local farms. These elevated crop levels definitely helped offset some of the yield shortages felt from last year, as well as helped offset some of the constant economic stresses being felt by our farmers during this current recession.

Of course, with all this resource use comes the need for resource conservation. In order to meet the demands of tomorrow, farmers must continuously strive to keep the soil healthy and the land viable. They do this by working with the District and its partner the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in establishing a conservation plan. This plan is an individualized guide for each local landowner, designed to assist them in managing their natural resources with the end goal of creating a healthy working landscape. It helps them decide which conservation practices fit best on their farm, for the purpose of building an overall stable resource management system. A conservation plan supports the

maintenance of resources for their continued effectiveness and long-term use, which at the same time puts more money in the farmers' pocket.

Over the last 70 years, Blackwater SWCD has worked arduously to spread its message of resource conservation to those willing to listen, for if you take care of the land it will in turn take care of you!



DISTRICT RETIREE

Ray Dewayne Ashworth



Dewayne Ashworth, long time District employee, retired this year from his job after 36 years of service. He started his career with Blackwater SWCD in the summer of 1976 as a Conservation Engineering Technician. His background in civil engineering, from schooling at Jefferson Davis Junior College and the University of South Alabama, made him the perfect fit for the District. In the position, he began his work assisting local landowners with their natural resource challenges.

In the following years, he dedicated himself to the planning and installing of conservation practices. Dewayne helped establish numerous grade stabilization structures, terraces, critical area treatments, and concrete /grass waterways throughout

the county. He also assisted with the establishment of several conservation management systems from residue tillage to crop rotation.

As his career advanced, he stepped up in ranks to a Conservation Engineering Technician II and then finally as the Senior Engineering Technician, where he took the role as lead individual over other District staff. He used his knowledge and expertise of the job to train new employees.

Dewayne wholeheartedly applied himself to the job with passion and a strong work ethic and therefore completed his long years of service to the District with a justifiable measure of pride. His conservation efforts in the county will continue to be of use long into the future.



DISTRICT HONOREES

Hall of Fame Award Millard Holley

Millard Holley was born and raised in nearby Okaloosa County. However, as a young man he moved to Santa Rosa County in order to start up his own farming operation. That was over fifty years ago and from that meager beginning he built, with a lot of hard work and determination, a justly earned successful family farming enterprise.

He was instrumental in the early prosperity of the Conservation Reserve Program in the county. This program was designed to take highly erodible land out of crop production. Pioneers like Mr. Holley recognized the wisdom of such conservation strategies and quickly adopted them into their farming operations. Upon his initiative, many



other local landowners soon followed and as a result the county maintains to this day some of the most productive farmland in the state.



Conservation Farmer Award Ryan Jenkins

Ryan Jenkins has been a staunch advocate of conservation practices for most of his farming career.

He has utilized resource friendly strategies like conservation tillage

and cover crop planting throughout his farming operations.

He was the first farmer in Santa Rosa County to adopt the new precision agriculture practice, which enables the application of a very precise and a just needed amount of pesticide and nutrient management chemicals on the field with the use of GPS satellite, grid soil sampling, and other computer software

technologies. Mr. Jenkins even helped the Natural Resources Conservation Service build a program in the first place to support the application of this practice, therefore setting the stage for his participation and his counterparts. As a result, precision agriculture is now being implemented on over 20,000 acres of farmland in the county yielding greater efficiency and drastically reducing the over application of agricultural chemicals.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



One of Blackwater SWCD's yearly initiatives is local community outreach. The District participates in a variety of civic activities throughout the year in an effort to inform the public about potential services. Working with a diverse group of community organizations, the District hopes to help as many people as possible with their resource concerns and problems.

One such event was this year's Magnolia Educational and Recreational Center Cookout. The District partnered with Three Rivers RC&D to assist this facility, located in East Milton, with funds to aid in its operations. This center whose slogan is "where education and community bloom together," offers summer school programs to local children of various ages. Donated funds were used to purchase much needed



games, crafts, educational materials, and playground accessories for use at the center. A cookout was held during the summer school session to honor the center's staff, local supporting citizens, and the program's participating youth. Also in attendance were individuals from the Santa Rosa County ARC organization. The event brought the community together for an afternoon of fellowship, communion, and fun. It also provided an opportunity for the District to get together with additional folks and offer its services to any of those in need.



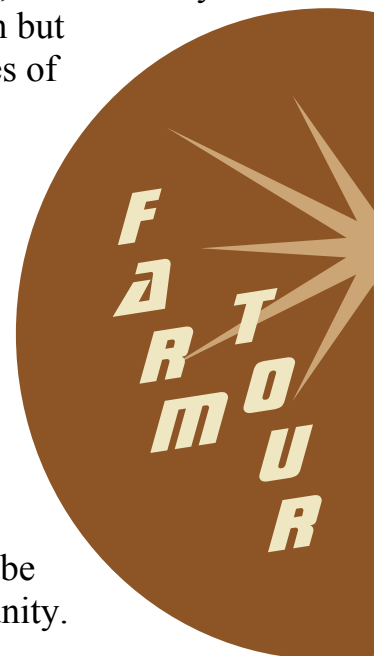
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The District also participated in the annual Farm Tour, an event hosted by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Cooperative Extension Service. This all day tour of Santa Rosa County farms promotes agricultural awareness and its role in our local economy, to those in attendance. Each year the tour acknowledges several agricultural enterprises within the county. Stops during this year's event included the Extension Service Teaching and Demonstration Gardens, Whispering Pines Christmas Tree Farm, Flinn's Family Farm, a Honey Bee Expo at Chumuckla's Farmers' Opry and Campground, the West Florida Research and



Education Center's Jay Research Farm, and Bruce Holland's Farm. Participants learned everything there is to know about Christmas tree production, bee rearing/honey processing, class one soils, and research projects in Santa Rosa County. They were also given insight about local farming operations from Shannon Flinn and his family, this year's honoree for the Outstanding Farm Family Award, (given by Commissioner Don Salter) and Bruce Holland of Holland's Farm, who not only shared his farming tradition but bounty as well with samples of melons and boiled peanuts.

Throughout the year, the District strives to improve community awareness by breaking down barriers of communication. By reaching out to people through events such as these, the District hopes to increase participation in its programs and services and be of some help to the community.



CONSERVATION PROGRAMS



assistance to local landowners. The program helps identify the appropriate conservation practices needed to address particular natural resource concerns. Landowners have therefore been able to successfully treat a variety of local natural resource issues with the financial and technical assistance offered through this program. Practices implemented in our

Blackwater SWCD's main weapon in the fight against natural resource harm is the USDA's federally

mandated Farm Bill programs. These federal programs offer cost-share incentives for the implementation of site specific conservation measures. Farm Bill programs, like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), enable the District to assist landowners with the planning and eventual application of environmentally sound and cost effective agricultural practices.

EQIP has been one of the most employed conservation programs in Santa Rosa County. For the past fifteen years it has been reliably funded in our area and has provided much needed

area this year thanks to EQIP include crop rotation, cover crop, conservation tillage, precision agriculture, pasture planting, cross fencing, irrigation upgrades, seasonal high tunnels, and tree planting. These practices improve soil, water, plant, animal, air, energy conservation, and related resources on agricultural land. The goal of this program is to optimize these environmental benefits while at the same time ensuring sustainable



CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

agricultural production for the landowner.

WHIP is another Farm Bill program that has been implemented in our county, though not as frequently as some other conservation programs. This program provides for a voluntary approach to improving wildlife habitats. Landowners willing to establish, restore, and improve essential plant and animal habitats receive technical and financial assistance. In the Southeast, the program promotes the restoration of the historically present longleaf pine savanna. This ecosystem once covered more than 90 million acres of what is now the southeastern United States. Today, only 3.4 million acres remain and much of that is fragmented and in poor condition. The goal of WHIP is to reverse the decline of this critical habitat on private lands, while at the same time protecting their productive capacity. The program utilizes practices that create and maintain forest health and

manage for wildlife. These practices include site preparation, tree establishment, prescribed burning, and invasive species control. A new conservation effort under WHIP is the Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative. This initiative targets habitats that benefit at-risk wildlife species. In our area, the target species is the gopher tortoise. It is a keystone species of the longleaf pine habitat and plays a critical role in maintaining the structure of this ecological community. This tortoise has been listed as a threatened species as a result of recent habitat and population losses. The goal of this new initiative is to enhance gopher tortoise habitat, increase habitat connectivity, and support the potential down-listing of the species.

Participation in these two programs, this year, resulted in nearly \$500,000 federal dollars being obligated for conservation work in our county. These Farm Bill programs and resulting conservation investments provide a valuable service to our local area farmers.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Blackwater SWCD participates in several local conservation education activities throughout the year. The District takes part in a variety of classroom lectures and career/science day events in order to develop awareness about our natural resources and the need for conservation, among local students.

District staff utilize a wide array of interactive exhibits, at these functions, as a way to reach out to students in a more memorable fashion. Tools like the District's Soil Tunnel help generate an even greater curiosity about soils

and soil formation. The tunnel enables students to explore the unexplorable; the complex physical, chemical, and biological world below the surface. The kids learn even more about soils with additional demonstrations that cover particle size, color, texture, and structure. This interactive program, now in its second year, has been a huge asset to the District and its work in environmental education.

Another education endeavor carried

out by the District is the National Association of Conservation District's annual Poster Contest. To participate, local students submit a poster with their own unique conception of the contest's annual conservation theme. First place District winners advance to the State contest. Many of our local students have also placed at the state competition level, receiving placement awards and monetary prizes.

THE SOIL TUNNEL



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



A long time education favorite of the District is the Land Judging Contest. This annual event, co-sponsored by the Santa Rosa County School Board, tests local high school FFA teams' expertise when it comes to soils and soil characteristics such as texture, permeability, slope, erosion, and drainage. Students, on school teams, examine four sites in which the soil has been exposed for several feet. They evaluate specific conditions at each of these sites and answer questions regarding them. Their responses are used to develop their scores and for determining the winning team and individual high

scorer. This year's winning team and high scorer were from Milton High School. The event took place on Mr. Hankin Mathews' pastureland, who generously loaned us use of his property and facilities for purposes of furthering agricultural knowledge.

The reason Blackwater SWCD spends time each year spreading awareness of conservation issues, is to further the continued wise use of our natural resources for the health and vitality of all. With just a little extra encouragement, our children can gain a better understanding of the world they live in and develop a greater respect and love for its resources.

WINNING TEAM

**Milton High School
Team 1 (L TO R)**

**Micaela Corley
Karissa Hebner
Laura Nelson**

HIGH SCORER

Laura Nelson

BLACKWATER SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

**The District Would Like To Acknowledge The Following
Agencies For Their Valuable Support And Cooperation:**



**SANTA ROSA BOARD OF
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**



**SANTA ROSA COUNTY
SCHOOL BOARD**



**NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE**



FARM SERVICES AGENCY



**DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**



FLORIDA FOREST SERVICE



**THREE RIVERS RESOURCE
CONSERVATION AND
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, INC.**



**EXTENSION OFFICE
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